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Time and Tide

The Remembrance Ritual of “Beskozyrka” in Novorossiisk

Au fil du temps : le rituel mémoriel de la « Beskozyrka » à Novorossiisk

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VICKY DAVIS

TIME AND TIDE

The Remembrance Ritual of “Beskozyrka” in Novorossiisk¹

Сколько бесстрашных ребят в бушлатах
и бескозырках нашли смерть в морской
пучине. Сколько раз мы видели в море
бескозырки погибших матросов.²

Возложите на море венки.
Есть такой человеческий обычай —
в память воинов, в море погибших,
возлагают на море венки.³

The battle to free the strategic Soviet Black Sea port of Novorossiisk from German occupation during the Great Patriotic War in 1943 was successfully fought from the beach-head of Malaia zemlia, held by Soviet landing troops, including the young Leonid Il'ich Brezhnev. Thanks to the publication of Brezhnev's over-inflated memoir *Malaia zemlia*,⁴ the campaign and Brezhnev's part in it became renowned in the Soviet Union while derided as insignificant

1. I am pleased to acknowledge the helpful comments of the CMR editors and anonymous reviewers; and the advice of my supervisors, Kristin Roth-Ey and Sarah Young, UCL-SSEES.

2. “So many fearless young sailors in pea-jackets and caps perished in the deep. So many times we saw dead sailors' caps floating on the sea.” Georgii Sokolov, *My s Maloi zemli* [We are from Malaia zemlia] (M.: Sovetskaia Rossiia, 1979), 367-368.

3. “Lay wreaths on the waves./This is society's custom:/in memory of soldiers who died at sea/wreaths are laid on the waves.” Excerpt from Andrei Voznesenskii, “Rekviem” (1975): *Andrei Voznesenskii: Sobranie sochinenii v trekh tomakh* [Andrei Voznesenskii: Collected Works in Three Volumes], Vol. 2 (M.: Khudozhestvennaia literatura, 1984), 269.

4. Leonid Il'ich Brezhnev, “Malaia zemlia,” in *Malaia zemlia: Vozrozhdenie* [Malaia zemlia: Regeneration] (M.: Prosveshchenie, 1979), 1-95 (first published in 1978).

by dissident and Western scholars.⁵ If the world and the rest of the Soviet Union virtually forgot this so-called minor battle after Brezhnev's death, its memory was retained in Novorossiisk. The unique remembrance ritual of "Beskozyrka" (a sailor's cap), invented in Novorossiisk in 1968, has increased in scale and scope over the last decade, maintaining the war myth locally and further afield. This analysis of the Beskozyrka tradition provides a case study of a provincial ceremony of remembrance started during the war cult of the Brezhnev era and now thriving under the influence of a second war cult under President Vladimir Vladimirovich Putin. This article will examine the role of young people in the invention and development of the tradition, while establishing the reasons for its success in promoting the intergenerational transmission of war memory in Novorossiisk from the early Brezhnev era to today.



Map of the Novorossiisk landings, 4th February 1943⁶

As part of my doctoral project on war memory in Novorossiisk, research on the history of Beskozyrka and current attitudes towards the tradition was carried out

5. For example: Zhores Medvedev, *Andropov* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1983), 101; and Nina Tumarkin, *Moscow's War Memorial: The Story of a National Symbol* (Wellesley, MA: Wellesley College, 1988), 50.

6. Reproduced with the permission of Novorossiiskii istoricheskii muzei-zapovednik.

during three trips to Novorossiisk between 2010 and 2013, with personal observation of the 2013 ceremony. The article builds on evidence from Novorossiisk museum archives; local newspaper articles; the published works of Konstantin Podyma, the main instigator of Beskozyrka; and a series of personal interviews with a cross-section of Novorossiisk residents.⁷

Hats off to Heroes: A Tribute from the Young People of Novorossiisk

According to the “invention of tradition” approach to the study of collective memory, developed by Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger,⁸ commemoration is usually orchestrated by the state and the élite with little dissent, any bottom-up approaches normally reinforcing top-down collective memory, and with the emphasis largely on unity of remembrance rather than a plurality of voices. Basing his arguments on remembrance through social practice,⁹ Hobsbawm claims that ritualistic traditions are often invented by governments seeking legitimization, establishing social cohesion by an implied continuity with the past and inculcating through repetition certain behavioural norms and moral values deemed to be desirable in society. The functional approach of Hobsbawm, like that of Emile Durkheim and Maurice Halbwachs before him,¹⁰ may allow for some small agreed revision of memory, but emphasizes rather the solidarity of society in its collective memory. Indeed, any potential binary opposition of national and local remembrance, official and vernacular interpretation, could serve to undermine political and national solidarity.

Superficially Hobsbawm’s approach may seem to offer a useful paradigm in the case of the centralized Soviet Union, but in fact the Beskozyrka ritual was invented not by the national élite, but by a small group of young local people, albeit no doubt under the influence of the state’s burgeoning war cult. Within a year of Brezhnev’s appointment as General Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, he had re-instated the Victory Day

7. 124 local citizens aged from 18 to 93 were interviewed between May 2010 and February 2013, with further evidence collected by email correspondence. 55.3% of the interviewees were women and 44.7% men. Interviewees, including Konstantin Podyma, teachers and lecturers, students, war veterans, housewives, historians, librarians, town councillors and journalists, were invited to discussions loosely structured around a series of questions in their workplace, at home or on neutral territory. UCL ethical approval was obtained for the project and confidentiality of respondents was guaranteed, although some experts agreed to waive this right. Anonymous interviewees are identified using the format “F (female) or M (male)/first digit of age/identifying letter”; the date of the relevant interview follows in brackets.

8. Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, eds., *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983).

9. Ibid.

10. Emile Durkheim, *Moral Education*, trans. E.K. Wilson (New York: Free Press, 1961) (first published 1925); Emile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, trans. Karen E. Fields (New York: Free Press, 1995) (first published 1912); Maurice Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory*, trans. Lewis A. Coser (Chicago, IL – London: University of Chicago Press, 1992) (first published 1925).

memorial ceremony on Moscow's Red Square for the twentieth anniversary of the end of the war in 1965. Television increasingly brought war memory to the masses with the series *Vyzyvaem ogon' na sebia* and *Podvig* both broadcast in 1965.¹¹

The change in state policy to promote war memory was anticipated in Novorossiisk in 1963, when the local Communist Party newspaper, *Novorossiiskii rabochii*, filled a whole page with war memories,¹² while the first reunion of "Malozemel'tsy" (troops who served on Malaia zemlia) took place on the twentieth anniversary of the successful culmination of the campaign.¹³ In 1965, the same paper was exceptionally published on a Sunday, devoting its whole four-page edition to the revived Victory Day celebrations. One by-product of the growing war cult, attributed by Nina Tumarkin to the state's wish to "mobilize loyalty [and] maintain order,"¹⁴ was the increase in status of Brezhnev by virtue of his military service and of Novorossiisk thanks to its association with Brezhnev. In an exercise of mutual self-promotion, Brezhnev awarded Novorossiisk the Order of the Great Patriotic War in May 1966. The increased momentum of the war cult enabled the relaxation of some restrictions on literary output, such that the first major Malaia zemlia war memoir appeared in 1967, authored by Georgii Vladimirovich Sokolov.¹⁵

With this build-up of the memorial climate nationally and locally during the mid-1960s, the time was ripe for a new form of commemoration in Novorossiisk. In January 1968, a ten-line paragraph appeared in the youth section of *Novorossiiskii rabochii*, advertising "Operatsiia 'Beskozyrka'" [The "Beskozyrka" Operation], a procession carrying the "torch of glory," lit from the Eternal Flame on Ploshchad' Geroev [Heroes' Square] to the site of the Malaia zemlia landings in the small hours of 4th February, in commemoration of the twenty-fifth anniversary of the start of the battle.¹⁶

The youth movement promoted by *Novorossiiskii rabochii* was inspired by the creation in 1962 of a club for young readers by *Komsomol'skaia Pravda*,¹⁷ the official organ of the Communist youth movement, the Komsomol. The Novorossiisk offshoot of the readers' club, named *Shkhuna rovesnikov*,

11. S. Kolosovii, *Vyzyvaem ogon' na sebia* [We draw fire on ourselves] (USSR: Mossfil'm, 1964-1965); *Podvig* [The Exploit] (USSR: Tsentral'noe televidenie SSSR, 1965).

12. Captain M. Shiriamov, "Zavtra - Prazdnik Pobedy [Tomorrow is Victory Day]," *Novorossiiskii rabochii* (8 May 1963), 2.

13. Georgii Sokolov, *Malaia zemlia: Rasskazy i ocherki* [Malaia zemlia: Stories and Essays] (Krasnodar: Krasnodarskoe knizhnoe izdatel'stvo, 1967), 383.

14. Nina Tumarkin, *The Living and the Dead: The Rise and Fall of the Cult of World War II in Russia* (New York: BasicBooks, 1994), 133-134.

15. Sokolov, *Malaia zemlia: Rasskazy i ocherki*.

16. "Operatsiia 'Beskozyrka' [The 'Beskozyrka' Ceremony]," *Novorossiiskii rabochii*, (12 Jan. 1968), 4.

17. Konstantin Podyma, "Vechnyi ogon' ": ty gori, ne sgorai... ["Eternal Flame": You are burning, never go out...] (M.: Pilotnoe izdanie, 2008), 8.

encouraged its teenage members (*Shkhunatiki*) to form the land-based crew of an imaginary schooner, incorporating a system of ranks, an oath of adherence and passwords for meetings. The founding captain and self-proclaimed helmsman of the *Shkhuna rovesnikov* was the novice *Novorossiiskii rabochii* journalist, Konstantin Ivanovich Podyma.¹⁸ Gathering his crew in November 1965, he invited all “romantics” and “fantasists” to set sail with him on a journey of dreams, discussion and self-discovery.¹⁹ Thus started the weekly meetings in their “cabin” in the *Novorossiiskii rabochii* offices,²⁰ leading to the proposal to mark the anniversary of the landings in 1968. The idea was to commemorate unburied troops who had died at sea by carrying a sailor’s peakless uniform cap (the eponymous “beskozyrka”) four kilometres through the streets of the town just after midnight. The hat would then be ceremonially lowered into the sea at Malaia zemlia, surrounded by wreaths of flowers.

This ceremony is possibly a reflection of the increasing focus on military-patriotic youth training in the Brezhnev era, strongly endorsed by the Komsomol.²¹ Membership of the Komsomol was expected for schoolchildren and students aged from 14 to 28 who became members of a primary cell, the bottom layer of a complex hierarchy of management mirroring the Communist Party organization.²² Nikolai Mitrokhin suggests that Komsomol activities centred around the war cult were highly controlled by nationalist sympathizers and encouraged by novels and memoirs about the war.²³ Furthermore, young people were taken to visit war sites and monuments as part of their moral upbringing (*vospitanie*).²⁴ Novorossiisk teenagers were possibly even more exposed to memory of the war than many of their peers. According to a former member of the *Shkhuna rovesnikov*, the young post-war generation of Novorossiisk was regaled with stories of wartime exploits recounted by their fathers and grandfathers.²⁵ Moreover, it is claimed that the *Shkhunatiki* would routinely find grenades, shell-cases and human remains, breeding a feeling of involvement in war memory from childhood and a sense of identification with the young partisans who had fought outside Novorossiisk during the war.²⁶

18. Konstantin Podyma, *Schastlivogo plavaniia, “Shkhuna Rovesnikov”!* [Happy sailing, “Shkhuna Rovesnikov”!], (M.: Detskaia literatura, 1975), 5.

19. *Ibid.*, 6.

20. Raisa Sokolova, *Beskozyrka* (Novorossiisk: Departament kul’tury Krasnodarskogo kraia, c. 2005), 8-9.

21. See Jonathan Brunstedt, “Building a Pan-Soviet Past: The Soviet War Cult and the Turn Away from Ethnic Particularism,” *Soviet and Post-Soviet Review*, 38, (2011): 149-171, 163.

22. A. Yurchak, *Everything was Forever until it was no more: The Last Soviet Generation* (Princeton, NJ and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2006), Chapter 3.

23. Nikolai Mitrokhin, *Russkaia partiia: dvizhenie russkikh natsionalistov v SSSR, 1953-1985 gody* [The Russian Party: The Russian Nationalists’ Movement in the USSR, 1953-1985] (M.: Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie, 2003), 114-116; 277.

24. Brunstedt, “Building a Pan-Soviet Past,” 164-166.

25. F6H, a former *Shkhunatik* (interview 05/02/2013).

26. Konstantin Podyma (05/02/2013).

Although the Shkhunatiki may in retrospect consider themselves to have been eccentric and atypical of their generation,²⁷ they were probably rather the product of their times and cultural environment, with relatively normal family backgrounds including peasants, accountants, workers in the port, doctors and managers in industry.²⁸ Indeed, according to Gleb Tsipursky's analysis, most of the readers of *Komsomol'skaia Pravda* in the early 1960s represented "conformist youth," who identified with the values propagated by the newspaper, including the strong sense of patriotism disseminated from above.²⁹ However, Podyma and two female Shkhunatiki categorically dismiss suggestions of direct Komsomol influence on the original Beskozyrka ceremony,³⁰ although it is possible that the overwhelming state propaganda machine of their youth went largely unnoticed due to its ubiquitous nature. They do, however, acknowledge Party support from the editor of *Novorossiiskii rabochii*, a member of the *gorkom*, the town committee of the Communist Party, who provided premises for their meetings and encouraged the already independent youngsters to organize the ceremony themselves, while nonetheless checking on the organizational details.³¹

F6H claims that it took time for the authorities to come to terms with the group's sometimes unusual projects, although Podyma believes that the Komsomol was unwilling to help because of the absence of prestigious veterans from the first ceremony. On the other hand, Podyma does allege that there was some peripheral involvement from the KGB (the state security service), whose border guards set up searchlights along the shore to light up their proceedings,³² a claim disputed by F6H. In the light of competing claims and lack of decisive evidence, it is difficult to gauge with certainty the degree of influence from above. This grassroots movement was no doubt considerably influenced by political ideology and the national memorial climate, albeit with scope for initiative and inventiveness coming directly from the younger generation.

Involving only twenty-two young people and six adults at first, the newly invented ritual of Beskozyrka faltered for a time, being banned by a Communist Party bureaucrat in 1969,³³ despite its patriotic intent. Party concern may have been due to a degree of nervousness about potential crowds of young people gathering together after the protest events in Moscow against the invasion of

27. F6H considers them to have been "angular rather than curved" (email 15/09/2013).

28. F6H.

29. Gleb Tsipursky, "Conformism and Agency: Model Young Communists and the Komsomol Press in the Later Khrushchev Years," *Europe-Asia Studies*, 7, (2013):1396-1416.

30. F6H and F7E (05/02/2013).

31. See Podyma, « *Vechnyi ogon'* »: ty gori, ne sgorai... , 2008, 19; and "Mify – ne rify, no v farvatere 'Beskozyrki' – ni k chemu! [Myths are not reefs, but for Beskozyrka there are no smooth waters!];" *Novorossiiskie izvestiia* (16 Feb. 2011), <http://novodar.ru/index.php/novohistory-punkt/2148-mnrnfbnkch-02-2011> [accessed 21/12/2011]. Parents of some marchers also worked for the Communist Party (Podyma and F7E).

32. "Mify – ne rify" *Novorossiiskie izvestiia*.

33. Ibid.

Czechoslovakia in 1968 as, although the ceremony was permitted officially in 1970, it was restricted to a much smaller area.³⁴ Following the intervention of influential veterans and the gorkom, local Komsomol officials were apparently finally convinced of the value of the ceremony and gave it their approval in 1971,³⁵ such that, by the outing of the third Beskozyrka, the number of participants had increased dramatically to five thousand, and by 1973 the press was already referring to it as an established tradition.³⁶

The rise in popularity of the Beskozyrka ritual during the 1970s mirrored the development of the war cult nationwide, when popular memory of the war was very much influenced by television and radio programmes.³⁷ Similarly, war films and novels remained popular, uniting the people's taste with state propaganda.³⁸ Denis Kozlov attributes a nationwide manifestation of an interest in history to the fact that it was a more "culturally acceptable" subject of discussion in Soviet society than internal or external politics, which invariably strayed into the realm of uncertainty.³⁹ This may have been true for the politically conscious intelligentsia, but the ordinary citizen could also identify with the courage shown and death toll in the war. In Novorossiisk, memory of the war was further promoted in 1973 when the town was made a Hero-City of the Soviet Union due to the Malaia zemlia campaign; with his vested interest in the town, Brezhnev himself came to make the official award in 1974. According to Hedrick Smith, a Western journalist based in Moscow, by the end of the 1970s Soviet cultural life had become "saturated with the war theme."⁴⁰

The early Beskozyrka tradition was apparently welcomed by both young and old, fusing the patriotic commemoration desired by the older generation with the romance of a secret society attractive to its young inventors. Sokolov recalls the emotion evoked by the ceremony as veterans silently remembered their fallen comrades, linked with their gratitude for the opportunity to pass on this memory to the younger generation.⁴¹ The involvement of veterans in moral

34. Ibid.; and Konstantin Podyma, "Beskozyrka": *Cherez gody i stoletia: Dokumental'naia povest'* ["Beskozyrka": After Years and Centuries] (Novorossiisk – M.: 2008), 41-2.

35. "Mify – ne rify," *Novorossiiskie izvestiia*.

36. Podyma, "Beskozyrka," 2008, 41 and 47; and "Plyvi, beskozyrka [Float, Beskozyrka]," *Novorossiiskii rabochii* (7 Feb.1973), 3.

37. Particularly *Ot vsei dushi* [From all my Heart] (see Kristin Roth-Ey, *Moscow Prime Time: How the Soviet Union Built the Media Empire that Lost the Cultural Cold War* (Ithaca, NY – London: Cornell University Press, 2011), 275-277; and the radio programme *V etot den' 30 let nazad* [Thirty Years Ago Today], see <http://www.tvmuseum.ru> [accessed 01/05/2013].

38. William Tompson, *The Soviet Union under Brezhnev* (Harlow: Pearson Education, 2003), 102.

39. Denis Kozlov, "The Historical Turn in Late Soviet Culture: Retrospectivism, Factography, Doubt, 1953-91," *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History*, 2, (2001): 577-600, 599.

40. Hedrick Smith, *The Russians* (New York: Quadrangle and The New York Times Book Company, 1976), 316.

41. Sokolov, *My s Maloi zemli*, 367-368.

education of the younger generation was then and remains today a key aspect of patriotic upbringing. In contrast, the main aspect of Beskozyrka enjoyed by the younger generation was the night-time torchlit procession with the secrecy of a complex system of passwords, an adventure in keeping with the romantic leanings of the Shkhunatiki, nurtured by the state emphasis on “romantic militarism,”⁴² exemplified by the publication of a series of biographies of romantic figures in history, *Plamennye revoliutsionery* [Fiery Revolutionaries].⁴³ Furthermore, the system of ranks and the military parade of Beskozyrka reflected official war cult values, which promoted a convergence of generations that would ensure the ceremony’s success.

A Changing Tradition or a Tradition of Change?

The juxtaposition of the concept of longstanding tradition with a relatively young state such as post-Soviet Russia may seem paradoxical, particularly bearing in mind the unsettled years of perestroika and the 1990s, when values were being re-assessed and Beskozyrka struggled to survive. Hobsbawm contends that newly invented traditions may be more widespread during periods of rapid social change and modernization to which older established traditions may succumb.⁴⁴ On the other hand, it may be argued that the comfort of any tradition, however young, is particularly welcome within an environment rendered unstable by war, political or financial crisis. According to Edward Shils, it is the very normativeness of tradition which acts as “the inertial force which holds society in a given form over time.”⁴⁵ Similarly, Paul Connerton sees the importance of ritual mainly in its invariance over time, as it relies increasingly on “habit-memory,”⁴⁶ a response acquired over the years. Halbwachs confirms that rituals tend to remain constant over time, even when society as a whole is in the process of change, as, especially in these circumstances, people tend to cling to tradition for the perceived security it offers,⁴⁷ a position endorsed by Hobsbawm, who observes that society normally

42. Brunstedt, “Building a Pan-Soviet Past,” 163.

43. The state-sponsored series was published from 1964 to 1990; see Polly Jones, “The Fire Burns On? The Fiery Revolutionaries Biographical Series and the Rethinking of Propaganda in the Early Brezhnev Era”, *Slavic Review* (forthcoming). The original crew were not only inventors of patriotic tradition, but also a literary society relishing war poetry, who notably paid homage to the romantic figure of poet Pavel Kogan, killed in the battle for Novorossiisk: F6H and Konstantin Podyma, ... *chtob ikh ne zabyvali my: Dokumental'nye ocherki* [So that We do not Forget Them] (Novorossiisk — M.: 2009), 28.

44. Eric Hobsbawm, “Introduction: Inventing Traditions,” in Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, eds., *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 1-14.

45. Edward Shils, *Tradition* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1981), 25.

46. Paul Connerton, *How Societies Remember* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 23.

47. Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory*.

preserves continuity by resisting change, unless it is introduced very gradually from above.⁴⁸

On the other hand, any inertia associated with a tradition, even one strongly linked with local identity, risks leading to stagnation, as evidenced by the political environment of the Brezhnev era. There is the concomitant risk that the ritual may become static and boring, with over-reliance on “habit-memory” leading to popular apathy rather than a proactive commitment to remember. However, my evidence suggests that, in the context of widespread external change, a society may adapt an old tradition for new conditions by grafting new rituals or language onto the original ceremony of commemoration. It is perhaps not surprising that an analysis of the development of the Beskozyrka tradition over time reveals gradual changes in the ritual which define each successive generation and serve to prevent potential mnemonic stagnation.

Accepting, unlike Connerton, that traditions may change gradually, Shils concludes that, despite this, the essential elements should remain recognizable during the process of transmission across generations.⁴⁹ Jan Assmann goes even further, arguing that change in traditions is unavoidable.⁵⁰ He contends that, as communicative memory transmitted orally spans a maximum of three or four generations, there must inevitably be some dilution of permanency with the passing of time. Shils, similarly, argues that traditions have an inbuilt life-span, although the relative inertia inherent in his model of propagation seems to argue against sudden inventions or changes in tradition. To survive for over four decades, however, particularly during the social and political consequences of the disintegration of the Soviet Union, the Beskozyrka tradition has needed to incorporate change. If necessity is the mother of invention, this has led the organizers of Beskozyrka to adopt a process of re-invention and rejuvenation, enabling each generation to place its own stamp on the ritual, while serving to prevent mnemonic stagnation and promote local identity. It will be demonstrated that the series of changes in Beskozyrka has been established not merely as the passive response typical of a comfortably apathetic society, but in a proactive attempt to attract young people and propagate war memory across the generations. Furthermore, in view of the scale and frequency of these innovations, it may even be argued that the concept of change in the Beskozyrka ritual has become an invented tradition in its own right.

48. Eric J. Hobsbawm, “The Social Function of the Past,” *Past Present*, 55, (1972): 3-17.

49. Shils, *Tradition*.

50. Jan Assmann, “Collective Memory and Cultural Identity,” *New German Critique*, 65, (1995): 125-133, 128.



The Unknown Sailor, Novorossiisk. Photograph Vicky Davis, 10/05/2010

Minor changes to the ceremony included a variation in the route in the 1970s, to take in the monument to the Unknown Sailor, the ribbons of his *beskozyrka* flowing prominently behind his head. With even younger children and their parents in mind, the time was brought forward firstly to the afternoon and then the evening of 3rd February, better facilitating cross-generational transmission. Raisa Mikhailovna Sokolova, archivist of the Novorossiisk museum, describes the addition of a solemn oath to the proceedings in 1978, the tenth anniversary of the tradition and the week during which Brezhnev's memoirs were published.⁵¹ Repeating the oath made by Major Tsezar' L'vovich Kunikov's troops prior to battle, the young people swore to become a living memorial to those who had given their lives. The original marine infantry had sworn to die for their country:

Волю свою, силы свои и кровь свою, каплю за каплей, мы отдадим за жизнь и счастье народа, за тебя, горячо любимая Родина!⁵²

51. Sokolova, *Beskozyrka*, 16-17.

52. "We will give up our own will, strength and blood, drop by drop, for the life and happiness of the people, for you, our beloved Motherland." Sokolova, *Beskozyrka*, 16; and Sokolov, *Malaia zemlia*, 10.

Furthermore, their historic success was reinforced in a dispatch from the War Council:

Вашей обороной, мужеством и героизмом гордятся ваши отцы, матери, жены и дети. Мы знаем, что маленькая земля станет большой и принесет освобождение стонущим от фашистского ига нашим родным отцам, матерям, женам и детям.⁵³

The heroes of Malaia zemlia were thus situated in a mythical historical continuum, charged with ensuring the freedom of their children, the generation responsible for the invention of the Beskozyrka tradition.

In contrast, the oath made by the Beskozyrka carriers in 1980 principally reflected the prevailing ideology of the Brezhnev era, as participants vowed to strive to work hard to fulfil Communist ideals, including the stringent economic demands of the tenth five-year plan.⁵⁴ It is perhaps not surprising that, in a ceremony with links to the General Secretary's wartime service, political ideology further complicated simple memory. Despite an ostensible wish to commemorate the past, this pragmatic consideration of the political environment, present and future, demonstrates that, towards the end of the Brezhnev era, national concerns barely connected with war memory had superseded the location-specific myth of Malaia zemlia.

In the early years after the fall of the Soviet Union, interest in Beskozyrka waned in line with national trends after Gorbachev had dismantled the Brezhnev era war cult and the struggle with the economy took over.⁵⁵ Newspaper reports of the ritual are scarce and several of my respondents mentioned that Beskozyrka in its original form barely survived,⁵⁶ with one member of the *Shkhuna rovesnikov* blaming the decline on the end of the Komsomol organization,⁵⁷ which had apparently continued to endorse the ceremony since 1971. However, a retired headmistress recalls that one hundred children from each of the local schools were invited during the 1990s to the town's theatre for a different type of commemoration involving about 5,000 annually,⁵⁸ reinforcing the claim that the town's head of culture and other founding

53. "Your fathers, mothers, wives and children will be proud of your defence, courage and heroism. We know that this small area of land will become great and will bring about the liberation of our fathers, mothers, wives and children groaning under the fascist yoke." Sokolov, *Malaia zemlia*, 8.

54. Leaflet held in the archives of Novorossiiskii istoricheskii muzei-zapovednik: "Operatsiia 'Beskozyrka-80'," MA 15049, Novorossiiskoe PPO, zak. No. 334 (21/01/1980).

55. Catherine Merridale, "War, Death and Remembrance in Soviet Russia," in Jay Winter and Emmanuel Sivan, eds., *War and Remembrance in the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 61-83, 79. Stephen Lovell considers that "war was not central to Gorbachev's self-understanding as it had been for his predecessors." (Stephen Lovell, *The Shadow of War: Russia and the USSR, 1941 to the Present* (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), 9-10.)

56. For example, M9A (07/05/2010), in charge of other rituals of remembrance; M5F (29/03/2011), a senior lecturer; and F3A, a teacher (10/05/2010). The local press makes no mention of Beskozyrka in 1993, the fiftieth anniversary of the landings.

57. F7E.

58. F7A (23/08/2013).

members of the ceremony kept the ritual alive.⁵⁹ This is plausible, since, following the town council's decision to take over responsibility for the ritual, it was back to full strength in 1998 for its thirtieth anniversary,⁶⁰ when a further innovation was introduced. Recalling the fact that *two* landings had actually taken place in 1943, two torches were lit and two hats carried to beaches: the first to Malaia zemlia in the usual fashion, and the second transported by tank to the site of the failed landings at Iuzhnaia Ozereika, where the ritual has evolved slightly differently, with its own committed following.⁶¹



Beskozyrka at the Eternal Flame on Heroes' Square.
 Photograph Vicky Davis, 03/02/2013

The twenty-first century has seen a partial return under President Putin to more conservative Soviet values, a renewed emphasis on *vospitanie* and the development of a new war cult.⁶² Once again, politicians promote a common

59. F7E.

60. "... Beskozyrka na volne [Beskozyrka on the Waves]," *Novorossiiskii rabochii* (4 Feb. 1998), 1.

61. According to the manager of a local veterans' council (19/03/2011).

62. The Putin era war cult has been well documented in, for example, Jutta Scherrer, "Sowjetunion/Rußland: Siegesmythos versus Vergangenheitsaufarbeitung [The Soviet Union/Russia: The Victory Myth versus a Reappraisal of the Past]," in Monika Flacke, ed., *Mythen der Nationen, volume 2. 1945: Arena der Erinnerung* [National Myths, Volume

interest in social coherence and continuity with the Soviet past, presenting the people with the image of a strong and united nation. It is notable that Putin admits to “a clear respect, even nostalgia” for the past,⁶³ a phenomenon well documented in Russia as a whole, particularly on the part of the older generation.⁶⁴ It seems that the involvement of the younger generation is central to current policy for the propagation of war memory, utilizing many of the strategies of the Brezhnev era, for example visits to schools by veterans and young people standing on military guard at monuments.

The majority of Russians of all ages welcomes the associated ceremonies and ritual reminiscent of the Brezhnev era, particularly Victory Day in May.⁶⁵ However the notoriously cold weather in February provides a ready-made excuse for inhabitants of Novorossiisk to stay indoors and not attend Beskozyrka. Some respondents search for further reasons for non-attendance, explaining how they would like to join in the procession, but would find it difficult to get there in the rush-hour traffic; moreover, they claim that their children are tired after school.⁶⁶ Possibly with this in mind, the organizers introduced in 2010 a newly invented offshoot of Beskozyrka, “Svecha v okne” the “candle in the window” movement, whereby those staying at home are encouraged to show their solidarity with the marchers outside by lighting a candle to place in the window as they pass by. Heavily promoted by the town council on posters and in newspaper advertisements, this modern idea is reminiscent of other ceremonies of remembrance worldwide. This new supplementary invented tradition is

2, 1945: The Field of Memory] (Mainz am Rhein: Philipp von Zabern, 2004), 619-657; I. Kurilla, “The Symbolic Politics of the Putin Administration,” in Philipp Casula and Jeronim Perovic, eds., *Identities and Politics during the Putin Presidency* (Stuttgart: Ibidem, 2009), 255-269; Lovell, *The Shadow of War*; Ivo Mijnsen, “The Victory Myth and Russia’s Identity,” *Russian Analytical Digest*, 72, (2010): 6-9; Lisa Kirschenbaum, “World War II in Soviet and Post-Soviet Memory,” *Soviet and Post-Soviet Review*, 38, (2011): 97-103; N.E. Koposov, *Pamiat’ strogogo rezhima: istoriia politika v Rossii* [Memory of a Strict Regime: The History of Politics in Russia] (M.: Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie, 2011); and Olga Kucherenko, “That’ll Teach’em to Love Their Motherland!: Russian Youth Revisit the Battles of World War II,” *The Journal of Power Institutions in Post-Soviet Societies*, 12, (2011).

63. Edwin Bacon and Mark Sandle, “Brezhnev Reconsidered,” in Edwin Bacon and Mark Sandle, eds., *Brezhnev Reconsidered* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2002), 203-217, 206.

64. For example: Svetlana Boym, “From the Russian Soul to Post-Communist Nostalgia,” *Representations*, 49, (1995): 133-166; Svetlana Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia* (New York: BasicBooks, 2001); Maya Nadkarni and Olga Shevchenko, “The Politics of Nostalgia: A Case for Comparative Analysis of Post-Socialist practices,” *Ab Imperio*, 2, (2004): 487-519; Svetlana Boym, “Nostalgia and its Discontents,” *Hedgehog Review*, 9, (2007): 7-18; and Serguei A. Oushakine, “We’re Nostalgic but We’re not Crazy: Retrofitting the Past in Russia,” *The Russian Review*, 66, (2007): 451-482.

65. Stephen M. Norris, “Memory for Sale: Victory Day 2010 and Russian Remembrance,” *Soviet and Post-Soviet Review*, 38, (2011): 201-229; and Elizabeth A. Wood, “Performing Memory: Vladimir Putin and the Celebration of World War II in Russia,” *Soviet and Post-Soviet Review*, 38, (2011): 172-200.

66. Notably M3E (22/03/2011), F4F (18/03/2011), F4H (16/03/2011) and F4I (17/03/2011).

particularly popular amongst women not wishing to venture outdoors,⁶⁷ and involves far more people than ever before, even if they do not demonstrate the commitment of those taking part in the cold. An innovation grafted onto an older, established tradition, it has the effect of enriching, rejuvenating and refreshing the ritual, rendering it more attractive to the younger generation and their parents. Furthermore, a new daytime Beskozyrka especially for children was introduced in 2013, attracting a further audience of 4,700 young people,⁶⁸ a cohort of citizens not able to deploy excuses when taken to the ceremony by their teachers, with their families responding to a complex mixture of expectation and freedom to attend.

The highlight of 2011 was a reconstruction of the landings at Malaia zemlia, repeated annually since then. Such events have become very popular globally, including in Russia, where the annual reconstruction of the Battle of Borodino attracts large crowds.⁶⁹ Whereas the older generation still recalls the more recent Soviet past, living memory of the war itself is on the brink of extinction. Perhaps for this reason, war memory in Russia often refers to ubiquitous heroism rather than to the more specific examples still cited in the 1990s.⁷⁰ On the other hand, there is considerable local geographical detail in the reconstructions, which bring to life the generalisms of the national war myth with some historical accuracy.

A re-enactment on the actual battle site can be a very powerful means of propagating collective memory, while still representing a relatively passive experience for the large audience. In contrast, the more intimate group in Iuzhnaia Ozereika witnessed a different spectacle in 2011. In a seemingly spontaneous gesture, the young beskozyrka bearer attracted gasps of admiration from spectators as he strode into the sea up to his shoulders to deposit the hat on the waves.⁷¹ An exchange of messages in an online forum established that he had gone into the water of his own accord, in a sudden surge of empathy with the original landing troops, and with no orders from above.⁷² In the light of this personal tribute in braving the winter waves, it appears that the romanticism of the young founders of Beskozyrka

67. For example F2A (14/05/2010), F3F (16/03/2011), F3I (18/03/2011), F5N (02/04/2011) and F6F (15/03/2011).

68. Oksana Mashkarova, "Vakhtu pamiati budut nesti i deti [Children will also Hold a Memorial Ceremony]," *Novorossiiskii rabochii* (18 Jan. 2013), 2; Lina Gritsenko, "Detiam pokazali, kto nastoiashchii supergeroi [Children were Shown who is a Real Superhero]," *Novorossiiskii rabochii* (5 Feb. 2013), 2; and interview with Deputy Mayor Natal'ia Vladimirovna Maiorova (04/02/2013).

69. See Julie Buckler, "Taking and Retaking the Field: Borodino as a Site of Collective Memory," in Julie Buckler and Emily D. Johnson, eds., *Rites of Place: Public Commemoration in Russia and Eastern Europe*, (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2013), 203-223, 218.

70. Norris, "Memory for Sale," 217.

71. Ol'ga Gaillesh, "Novorossiisk 'Beskozyrka 2011'," *Munitsipal'naia novostnaia lenta* (4 Feb. 2011), <http://www.nrnews.ru/news/?id=42581> [accessed 09/02/2011].

72. Ibid.: online responses.

lives on, at least in Iuzhnaia Ozereika,⁷³ where there remains some scope on the fringe for the individual in organized remembrance today. However, this originally spontaneous part of the ceremony has now been incorporated into the main ritual at Malaia zemlia, an indication perhaps of the increasingly centralized control of Beskozyrka, both administratively in the organization by the town council, and physically in the ranks of Cossacks holding the spectators at bay. Such top-down intervention has prompted some negative comments in online discussions from citizens about over-organization and the desecration of genuine memory for the sake of political utility.⁷⁴



The Beskozyrka bearer laying the hat and the wreath in the sea (03/02/2013).

Photograph Anatolii Pozdniakov⁷⁵

What started out as a series of sometimes minor innovations and refinements to the invented tradition of Beskozyrka has become a tradition of invented change in its own right, enabling each generation to take ownership of the ritual. Even in 2012, more changes were still being promised:

73. Although the lack of romanticism in most modern youngsters is bemoaned by G.A. Krympokha in "Proshchaite, Galina Alekseevna [Farewell, Galina Alekseevna]," *Novorossiiskii rabochii* (22 Aug. 2011), <http://www.novorab.ru/ArticleSection/Details/3658> [accessed 02/09/2011].

74. Online responses to Gailesh, "Novorossiisk 'Beskozyrka 2011'," *Munitsipal'naia novostnaia lenta*.

75. Photograph by Anatolii Pozdniakov, copyright of the photographer and reproduced with his permission.

Из года в год суть акции [...] не меняется, но с каждым разом сценарий обрastaет новыми памятными деталями. Этот год не станет исключением.⁷⁶

Despite the innovations, there is comfort in the continuity of symbolism in the Beskozyrka tradition. With candles, caps and ribbons, its interpretation and essence remain constant, although the consistency of symbolism permits only one interpretation of the past, in accord with the conventions of the war myth, albeit widely endorsed by the local population. Beskozyrka still appeals to the same members of society: the conservative middle classes, teachers, cadets and veterans, although the first actors would hardly recognize the scale of today's operation and the veterans are becoming fewer.

With the participation of schools, the interest of parents is guaranteed. Here is an example of the harnessing of children to effect what I term the "reverse propagation" of memory, with some young families new to Novorossiisk learning about Beskozyrka and coming to appreciate local history thanks to their children.⁷⁷ As in the case of the original inventors, the memory "message," with its traditional symbolism, is still being transmitted back in new ways to the older generation by the youngest, complementing and reinforcing the traditional propagation mechanism from older to younger generations.

In contrast, responsibility for the Beskozyrka ritual, founded by and traditionally associated with the young people of Novorossiisk, was taken over in 1999 by the regional youth committee, this time involving a committee *for* youth rather than the younger generation themselves, who thereby appear to have lost their original ownership of the ceremony. The following year, Beskozyrka became known as a pan-Russian operation,⁷⁸ its name today emphasizing its roots: "Vserossiiskaia molodëzhnaia patrioticheskaia aktsiia 'Beskozyrka'" [The pan-Russian patriotic youth movement "Beskozyrka"]. Despite the implicit geographical expansion, attendees are largely local, with the financial burden of the ceremony falling on the town of Novorossiisk, whose mayor now takes responsibility for its implementation, possibly reflecting some local rivalry over the ownership of memory between the hero-city of Novorossiisk and the regional centre of Krasnodar. The 2011 advertising pamphlet, published by the region, confirms the continued emphasis on youth participation, although there is no mention of its young founders and their vision, indicating perhaps that the authorities are anxious to take all the credit.

76. "From year to year the movement [...] does not change, but on each occasion the programme acquires new memorial components. This year will be no exception." Evgeniia Simanovich, "'Svechu v okne' mozhët zazhech' kazhdyi [Everybody can Light a Candle in the Window]," *Novorossiiskii rabochii* (23 Jan. 2012), <http://www.novorab.ru/> [accessed 23/01/2012].

77. For example F3C (15/03/2011), M3F (16/03/2011) and F4L (05/02/2013).

78. Sokolova, *Beskozyrka*, 17-19.

Despite this omission, Podyma, a prolific inventor of tradition both in Novorossiisk and Moscow, has numerous publications on Beskozyrka and other less well-known memorial rituals to his credit.⁷⁹ For over forty years he consistently propagated the myth of Malaia zemlia, building up a legend around the *Shkhuna rovesnikov*, which, he claims, spread from Novorossiisk to other “outposts” around the Soviet Union.⁸⁰ At the same time he nurtured his own personality cult as its “romantic” founder and only true guardian of memory.⁸¹ In Novorossiisk Podyma’s name has become just as recognized as those of the real heroes of Malaia zemlia. While children learn about the history of Kunikov and his landing troops,⁸² older interviewees are equally likely to speak about the propagation of memory through Podyma’s Beskozyrka ritual,⁸³ which has also been assimilated into the local history of the town, albeit a generation younger than the war itself.

Moral education of the young is once again valued, inculcated in schools thanks to the new emphasis on patriotism, a topic now included in the school curriculum, which is dictated by the state and implemented through the regions.⁸⁴ Apparently this is endorsed by some parents and grandparents,⁸⁵ who appreciated such behavioural instruction in the Pioneer and Komsomol organizations of their youth and welcome it now for their own children and grandchildren.⁸⁶ The mnemonic vicious circle may have been broken through the tradition of change, but Soviet society’s traditional values are increasingly being projected through ritual onto the younger Russian generation, subject today to domination and determination by the élite who now organize Beskozyrka, rather than the romantic young idealists of 1968.

79. For a description of a ritual invented by Podyma in 1976 to commemorate those who died on the first night of the war in 1941, see Podyma, “*Vechnyi ogon’*”: *ty gori, ne sgorai...*, 5. Other works on memory by Podyma include: *Na volne pamiati* [On the Waves of Memory] (M. – Novorossiisk: Sentiabr’, 2008); “Beskozyrka”: *Cherez gody i stoletii*; and ...*chtob ikh ne zabyvali my: Dokumental’nye ocherki*.

80. Podyma, “*Vechnyi ogon’*”: *ty gori, ne sgorai...*, 5.

81. Sokolova, *Beskozyrka*; and Professor Tamara Iurina, “Teleurok grazhdanstvennosti, posviashchennyi 40-letiiu operatsii ‘Beskozyrka’ [Television Lesson on Citizenship: The 40th Anniversary of the ‘Beskozyrka’ Movement]”, *Novaia Rossiia* (3 Feb. 2008). Furthermore, 15,000 documents await scholarly study in Podyma’s archive, RGASPI.

82. According to the history curriculum of School No. 6 and the Bekar School in Novorossiisk. Information is also propagated in local libraries. The pupils’ viewpoint was analysed from the results of a survey of schoolchildren of the Bekar School and School No. 6.

83. A total of 65 out of 124 interviewees.

84. Patriotism is the new top topic of the Russian curriculum, according to the headteachers of School No. 6 (13/05/2010), School No. 19 (29/03/2011) and the Bekar School (06/05/2010). Furthermore, schools devote the whole month of February to patriotism, almost seamlessly linking history of the landings on 3rd February with national men’s day, “Den’ zashchitnika Otechestva,” on 23rd February.

85. A total of 21 respondents: 14 women and 7 men.

86. One local library held an event in 2009 to celebrate the birth of the Komsomol, according to librarians F5J and F5K (23/03/2011).

Time and Tradition

Confiding her personal thoughts during remembrance ceremonies, a respondent reflects: "I think behind my eyes: I try to imagine it, from films and books, how awful it was: explosions, how they lived. It must have been very hard."⁸⁷ This is a good example of trans-temporal empathy promoted by a successful memorial ritual, whereby the imagination is converted into a time-machine capable of linking two distant moments in time by the act of memory. Shils expresses well the notion of time-travel through the imagination, considering tradition to be "the past in the present but as much part of the present as any very recent innovation."⁸⁸ The return to the past both culturally and mnemonically raises the question of the complex temporality of memory with respect to historical time: an imaginative memory may close the gap between past and present which exists thanks to the passage of historical time. A traditional society is typically brought together spatially by the annual rhythm of anniversaries, integrating it temporally with its common past by the temporary reduction of historical distance, thereby promoting understanding of past events and empathy with the people involved.

Personal identification with the troops was also noticeable in discussions with younger male respondents about war films, demonstrating the "prosthetic memory" described by Alison Landsberg, which offers a mechanism "at the interface between a person and a historical narrative about the past" for the acquisition of powerful memories which were not actually experienced.⁸⁹ This type of visual influence is similarly possible during the Beskoyrka reconstructions, when a reversal of time is apparent on the very same space where the landings took place, reducing the perceived relative time gap between past and present with a concomitant increase in identification between present-day participants and the original troops. Those taking part in the ritual act as time-travellers, approaching the Malaia zemlia monument from the present, crossing the timeless space around it, to arrive in the past via the Brezhnev era as they reach the monument itself. Thus the monument in the shape of the prow of a launch, erected in 1982, seems transformed back into the original craft it represents, while its sculpted depictions of the original 1943 landing troops are transformed by the ritual into the ranks of the modern soldiers reconstructing the landings. The static monument and the memory it channels may have outlived the heroes, but still transmit the timeless testimony of non-contestable patriotic heroism appreciated by all stake-holders in the Beskozyrka ritual.

87. F4G (15/03/2011).

88. Shils, *Tradition*, 13.

89. Alison Landsberg, "Prosthetic memory: Total Recall and Blade Runner," in Mike Featherstone, Roger Burrows, eds., *Cyberspace/Cyberbodies/Cyberpunk: Cultures of Technological Embodiment* (London: Sage, 1995), 175-189, 2.



Malaia zemlia memorial. Photograph Vicky Davis, 02/04/2004

According to Sokolov, the *beskozyrka* floating on the water is carried by the same waves as in 1943, themselves depicted as insensitive carriers of memory of those who lost their lives:

Не выйдут, нет, не выйдут на берег эти ребята. Только бесчувственные волны бьются о берег, напоминая о минувшем...⁹⁰

Thus the sea itself is deemed to be an agent in the apparent closing of the temporal gap between 1943 and today. Not only the waves recall the night, apparently. A classmate of Konstantin Podyma feels that nature as a whole sees the need to reproduce the conditions of 1943 in tribute to the troops.⁹¹ An aspect of the war myth expressed by respondents of all ages includes the legendary icy wind and stormy weather every year on the night of 3rd - 4th February.⁹² Podyma himself stated on one of his recent visits to Novorossiisk:

Так уж назначено природой, что третьего февраля в Новороссийске всегда ненастье – дождь, ветер, пробирающий до костей холод.⁹³

90. "They will never return, no, these lads will never return to shore. Only the senseless waves beat on the shore, remembering the past ..." Sokolov, *My s Maloi zemli*, 368.

91. F6F.

92. Sokolova, *Beskozyrka*, 14; interviewees include F2A, F4G, F4I, M5B (18/03/2011), F6F and F8C (05/05/2010).

93. "It is appointed by nature that it is always foul weather on 3rd February in Novorossiisk, with wind, rain, and bitter cold which penetrates to the bones." ("Fevral'skii poriv [February

In a masterpiece of understatement, *Novorossiiskii rabochii* proclaims:

В этот день свято соблюдаются традиции не только жителями, но и погодой. Третье февраля никогда не балует теплом.⁹⁴

Women, particularly, refer to wearing layers of clothes for the ceremony,⁹⁵ with some men feeling that the freezing weather enables them better to empathize with the landing troops jumping into the icy water in the middle of the night.⁹⁶ Podyma, describing in 1975 the first Beskozyrka seven years previously, emphasized the similarities:

Февральская ночь была морозной, ветерной. Точно так же, как много лет назад...⁹⁷

Even the password on that night reflected the prevalent winter wind in Novorossiisk: “Nord ost” [north-easterly]. In 2012, myth became reality, as hardy citizens turned out in unprecedented temperatures:⁹⁸

Третьего февраля в Новороссийске хорошей погоды не бывает. Никогда! Но в этом году погода сжалась и вчерашние минус 15 с ветром, сменили вполне терпимые минус 3.⁹⁹

The Beskozyrka tradition, which was started on the 25th anniversary of the landings, also has its own anniversary timeline. One recent book, for instance, links the 35th anniversary of the landings with the tenth anniversary of Beskozyrka itself, giving almost equal importance to both.¹⁰⁰ A newspaper article in 2007 completely

Storm]), *Novorossiiskii rabochii* (29 Jan. 2011), 3.)

94. “On this day, tradition is religiously observed not only by citizens, but also by the weather. A warm wind never blows on 3rd February.” Viktoriia Nikolaenko, “‘Beskozyrka’ vskolykhнула volny nashei pamiati [‘Beskozyrka’ Stirred up the Waves of our Memory],” *Novorossiiskii rabochii* (4 Feb. 2011), 1.

95. For example F3A, F3K (23/03/2011), F4G, F6D (09/05/2010), F7B (08/05/2010) and F7C (19/03/2011).

96. Especially M3A (10/05/2010) and M5B.

97. “The February night was freezing and windy. Exactly the same as many years ago ...” (Podyma, *Schastlivogo plavaniia*, “*Shkhuna Rovesnikov*”!, 67-8).

98. F3A by personal email (04/02/2012).

99. “There is never good weather on 3rd February. Never! But this year the temperature plunged even below yesterday’s -15C, with wind too, a change from the usual more tolerable -3C.” “V Novorossiiske sostoialas’ sorok chetvërtaia operatsiia ‘Beskozyrka’ [The forty-fourth ‘Beskozyrka’ ceremony has taken place in Novorossiisk],” *Novorossiiskii rabochii* (3 Feb. 2012), <http://www.nrnews.ru/news/?id=47939> [accessed 04/02/2012]. However prevalent the myth, it could not influence the unusually high temperatures of February 2013: “Tak zharko v nachale fevralia v krae bylo 30 let nazad [It was just as warm at the beginning of February 30 Years ago],” *Novorossiiskii rabochii* (8 Feb. 2013), 2.

100. Sokolova, *Beskozyrka*, 15.

misunderstands the dates, though, confusing the commemoration with the actual historical event, and stating that 2007 would see the 39th anniversary of the landings, rather than the 39th anniversary of Beskozyrka.¹⁰¹ It is tempting to infer that the journalist is a relatively young person, for whom the fixed temporal horizon of 1968 seems just as far away as 1943, such that real time and mythical time have virtually converged. Certainly, it provides further evidence that, for some at least, the act of commemoration has become more significant than the distant event it commemorates, while also suggesting that memory of the Malaia zemlia campaign in Novorossiisk is indeed incomplete without the Beskozyrka tradition.

Beskozyrka also breaks the established temporal order in another way, eating into free time on a long February evening, when many families would prefer to be at home. Since 2010, even the private time of those not taking part in the procession outside has been invaded by ritualistic time thanks to the “candle in the window” movement, which also demands extra memorial space as the Beskozyrka ritual expands into people’s homes. There is no doubting the spatial and temporal expansion of Beskozyrka. What started out as a small-scale evening event now takes up the whole of the 3rd February, and most of the previous day, as increasing numbers of delegates from other towns are invited to take part in an ever-longer programme of events in a growing statement of local identity.

The Turning of the Tide

Some scholars argue that the construction and propagation of collective war memory depends substantially upon performative ritual.¹⁰² On the other hand, Allan Megill argues that there is no need for ritual commemoration in a society where direct, living memory remains strong.¹⁰³ However, this argument ignores not only the comfort provided to the bereaved by repetition in a social context, but also the fact that often passive memory is reinforced by the more active process of ritualistic remembrance. Similarly, Pierre Nora’s claim that modern society has effectively banished ritual is patently not applicable to war memory in Russia,¹⁰⁴ being also robustly disputed by Jay Winter and Emmanuel Sivan, who emphasize the fact that survivors of European wars still engage in collective acts of commemoration.¹⁰⁵

101. “Galina Krympokha prochitala lektsiiu o vysadke desanta na Maluiu zemliu starsheklassnikam shkoly No. 30 [Galina Krympokha Spoke about the Malaia zemlia Landings to Senior Pupils at School No. 30],” *Munitsipal’naia novostnaia lenta* (1 Feb. 2007), <http://nrnews.ru/news/?id=2729> [accessed 2/9/2011].

102. See, for example, Yael Zerubavel, *Recovered Roots: Collective Memory and the Making of Israeli National Tradition* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1995).

103. Allan Megill, “History, Memory, Identity,” *History of the Human Sciences*, 11 (1998): 37-62.

104. Pierre Nora, “Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Mémoire,” *Representations*, 26 (1989): 7-24, 12.

105. Jay Winter, and Emmanuel Sivan, “Introduction,” in Jay Winter and Emmanuel Sivan, eds., *War and Remembrance in the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University

Serguei Oushakine has proposed that modern Russians are united in their collective memory by a “patriotism of despair” following the segregation and fragmentation brought about by the trauma of recent wars, especially in Afghanistan and Chechnia.¹⁰⁶ Beskozyrka, however, is not rooted in the disillusionment of bereaved families; rather, in common with other rituals of commemoration of the Great Patriotic War,¹⁰⁷ it demonstrates the sense of a debt on the part of the living to those who lost their lives in the landings, a sacrifice which led to the eventual liberation of Novorossiisk from enemy occupation. In Russian social culture, the exact site of burial is a vital focus for socially prescribed mourning.¹⁰⁸ In the case of soldiers lost at sea, with no obvious monument or grave for the bereaved family to visit, the simple sailor’s cap floating on the waves provides the only focal point for tributes of flowers and the expression of emotion.

The original Beskozyrka ceremony also served to fill an ideological vacuum in the Soviet Union. Celebrations in February are not uncommon in other societies to alleviate the tedium and hardship of the long winter before the days lengthen and the signs of spring appear. In a blend of Christian and pagan tradition, many countries hold a carnival week at the beginning of February before the onset of the rigours of Lent, although the traditional Russian carnival *Maslenitsa* was banned in Soviet times. Beskozyrka is neither joyous nor food-orientated, but does involve those elements of flame and liturgy more often associated with church ritual. Similarly, the sailor’s hat is borne in procession and laid on the waves in an act resembling an offering to the memory of the landing troops. Reinforcing this interpretation, one respondent throws sweets and biscuits into the sea behind the hat and the wreaths, as her own small sacrifice to the dead.¹⁰⁹

Candles are very often lit in a Russian Orthodox church in an act of memory and are carried by President Putin in official services of remembrance.¹¹⁰ With implicit religious symbolism, the new “candle in the window” movement now effectively brings the sacred memorial ritual into the secular home, using the symbolism of the candle to shed light on memory. The placing of the candle on a windowsill, visible from the outside, also breaches any remaining barriers between the collective and the private with respect to memory. The quasi-religious symbolism of the liturgy and ritual of Beskozyrka is evident in the symbols of light and fire, the imagery of sacrifice and martyrdom. Secular collective memory

Press, 2000), 1-5, 1.

106. Serguei Oushakine, *The Patriotism of Despair: Nation, War and Loss in Russia* (Ithaca, NY – London: Cornell University Press, 2009).

107. For example, the custom in Russia to lay flowers to the war dead after a wedding.

108. Catherine Merridale, “Russia,” in Glennys Howarth and Oliver Leaman, eds., *Encyclopedia of Death and Dying* (London: Routledge, 2001), 390-1.

109. F7C.

110. Catherine Merridale, *Ivan’s War: Life and Death in the Red Army, 1939-1945* (New York: Picador, 2006), 378.

and organized religion have much in common, with memory perhaps becoming a “surrogate” religion or faith system.¹¹¹

Although few Soviet soldiers in the war were overt Christians, the Orthodox Church today is very close to the state, a situation accepted by veterans and encouraged by Putin, who ensures that priests pray for the war dead.¹¹² The joint influence of state and Church should aid in principle both the retention of collective memory and the inculcation of conservative moral values. However, most of my respondents did not feel the necessity for the presence of a priest at Beskozyrka, most viewing it as a purely secular occasion,¹¹³ despite the claim by local priest Father Georgii that 95% of the population of Novorossiisk are Orthodox believers. On the other hand, Father Georgii considers his presence there to be vital. He has been invited by the Mayor to attend in an official capacity for the last eight years, demonstrating the increasing importance of the Church in Russia both socially and politically. While wearing his own military medals, Father Georgii’s role remains largely symbolic, as he is not usually invited to speak, in contrast to his input on other memorial occasions.¹¹⁴ There is no doubt that religion does play a part in memory today, but, according to my evidence, that part is largely in the personal sphere.

The need for individual personal remembrance and mourning is rarely acknowledged in top-down, “invention of tradition” theory, but is recognized by Winter in his analysis of the process of remembrance as the response to bereavement.¹¹⁵ Issues of personal grief may no longer be applicable so long after the war, but individuals must still make a choice whether or not to attend a ritual, even if subject to group pressure. Connerton addresses this particular question in his study of how collective memory is transmitted and retained by social groups both large and small,¹¹⁶ concluding that the phenomenon of “habit-memory” supplants any interpretative capacity of the individual. The evidence in Novorossiisk, however, demonstrates a strong commitment by attendees to the ceremony in the face of often daunting weather conditions which serve only to strengthen the bond between those remembering and those remembered. Most participants in the Beskozyrka tradition are not simply passive spectators, but are able to justify their presence, usually accepting some physical discomfort as an aid to their interpretation of the ritual. This may not always be true for those simply watching a reconstruction, but it remains the case for those making the longer journey to the beach at Iuzhnaia

111. Barbara Misztal, “Durkheim on Collective Memory,” *Journal of Classical Sociology*, 3, 2003: 123-143, 139.

112. Merridale, *Ivan’s War*, 378-9.

113. Particularly male interviewees, who stressed the mixture of faiths and ethnicities of the original troops.

114. Interview with Father Georgii (14/03/2011).

115. J.M. Winter, *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning: The Great War in European Cultural History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995). Winter interprets mourning practices as providing consolation through classical art, language and monuments within the traditional healing framework.

116. Connerton, *How Societies Remember*.

Ozereika outside Novorossiisk. Here, the genuinely involved younger participants are compared favourably with the original Shkhunatiki by Galina Krympokha, an Honoured Citizen of Novorossiisk, who is credited with keeping the *Shkhuna rovesnikov* and its crew afloat over the long years since its inception¹¹⁷: “Tam net ravnodushnykh glaz” [there are no indifferent eyes there].¹¹⁸

It is possible that the current wave of nostalgia for the Soviet Union plays a role in the popularity of rituals of remembrance dating back to the Brezhnev era.¹¹⁹ My observations, however, point rather to the importance of a sense of continuity with the past – not with the Soviet Union in general, but rather to a familial connection provoked by the strong feeling of empathy with the landing troops. Many of my interviewees were able to point to their individual ancestors who had fought locally in the war, with respondents at both ends of the age spectrum claiming that they had inherited the hardy and heroic character of their forebears.¹²⁰ It appears that older family members act as links in a memory chain which connects today’s citizens genetically with the landing troops. Extrapolating from the individual to the community in general, the headmistress of School No. 6 observed that the heroism typical of wartime is transmitted through ritual, as if “caught” by the younger generation in the form of improved behaviour: “*geroicheskoe iavlenie diktuets povedenie* [an heroic occurrence dictates behaviour].”¹²¹ A local historian commented on this phenomenon, stating that “it is as if they drink it in their mothers’ milk.”¹²² For example, a former soldier believes that the town’s inhabitants “were born” from Malaia zemlia,¹²³ while a town councillor interprets memory as “our blood, our duty, future and past together.”¹²⁴ Indeed, a young teacher sees war memory as part of the town’s “living organism,” whereby knowledge about Malaia zemlia is “naturally” assimilated.¹²⁵ Thus the propagation of memory is linked to the transmission of a belief and behaviour system. This sense of communal memory nurtured in the young is epitomized in the slogan ubiquitously found on school walls: “*Pobeda deda moia pobeda*” [My grandfather’s victory is my victory].

In contrast, evidence suggests that some young adults may have experienced enough of the Beskozyrka tradition following years of enforced participation as schoolchildren.¹²⁶ However, the tradition is re-fuelled with fresh blood as

117. Tat’iana Staroverova, *Novorossiiskii rabochii* (30 Nov. 2010), <http://www.novorab.ru/ArticleSection/Details/1733> [accessed 02/09/2011].

118. “Fevral’skii poryv,” *Novorossiiskii rabochii*.

119. See FN 66.

120. Notably M1A (14/05/2010) and F8C.

121. Interview 27/10/2010.

122. M5E (26/03/2011).

123. M4B (17/03/2011).

124. M5D (23/03/2011).

125. F3A (10/05/2010).

126. For example, M1A.

newcomers to the area seem keen to attend the ceremony,¹²⁷ while locals bring friends from further afield to experience it at first hand,¹²⁸ attracted by the unique maritime connotations of the ritual.¹²⁹

It is clear that there remains a place today for traditional ritualistic ceremony in this modern, youth-oriented society, despite the fact that an established tradition may be regarded as a sign of conservatism in a society, as it simply maintains the status quo. In Novorossiisk evidence suggests that the combination of the new state-sponsored war cult of the Putin era,¹³⁰ with the influence of the more reactionary, provincial older generations, is sufficient to counteract the sometimes anti-traditional attitude of young people.

Although currently larger than ever, the numbers attending Beskozyrka remain substantially smaller than those celebrating Victory Day in Novorossiisk, mainly due to the different nature of the remembrance involved. As a celebration of national victory in 1945, Victory Day is less solemn than Beskozyrka. Citizens feel that Victory Day is a different type of event: national, happier and more celebratory, while Beskozyrka demands a more thoughtful approach to memory, which, according to many respondents, comes directly from the romantic soul of the young people of Novorossiisk.¹³¹

The continuing sense of identification with Beskozyrka of the younger generation, with the gratitude and participation of many of their elders, maintains a sense of social cohesion that may easily have died out with other traditions during the 1990s. Furthermore, its original, specifically local interpretation endures, despite and also thanks to a series of changes, usually regarded as elements of creative enrichment of the ceremony and recently taking their inspiration from commemorative norms worldwide rather than a small local youth club. Shils may regard originality as the enemy of tradition,¹³² but, in Novorossiisk, it has helped to avoid any dilution of meaning and has guaranteed the longstanding popularity of Beskozyrka, which is now at an all-time high, with no sign of ritual fatigue. Indeed, official council figures state that 15,000 participants in 2011 remembered the heroes of 1943,¹³³ while figures for 2013 suggest that a record 23,500 attended the ceremony, an indication of the growing popularity of the

127. 8 out of the 12 relative newcomers to the town interviewed claimed that they take part in Beskozyrka.

128. According to F3E (16/03/2011).

129. For example, friends from other towns are invited by M4C (29/03/2011) and F7A.

130. See, among others, Brunstedt, "Building a Pan-Soviet Past"; Kirschenbaum, "World War II in Soviet and Post-Soviet Memory"; Norris, "Memory for Sale"; and Elizabeth A. Wood, "Performing Memory."

131. Voiced by several respondents, particularly F3I.

132. Shils, *Tradition*, 236.

133. "V Novorossiiske proshla Vserossiiskaia vakhta pamiati 'Beskozyrka-2011' [The Pan-Russian Memorial Ceremony 'Beskozyrka-2011' Took Place in Novorossiisk], *Ofitsial'nyi sait administratsii i Dumy munitsipal'nogo obrazovaniia gorod-geroi Novorossiisk* (4 Feb. 2011), <http://www.admnvrsk.ru/joo.admnvrsk.ru/index.php/2010-02-26-12-44-41/427>

tradition.¹³⁴ Although Beskozyrka remains a tradition reinforcing local identity, Podyma has claimed that visitors from 270 other towns have taken part over the years.¹³⁵ In 2011, for example, delegates were invited from other hero-cities to take part in a series of events and a ritual on a much larger scale, with coverage on the national television news confirming the status and identity of Novorossiisk nationwide.¹³⁶ With the national focus in 2013 on the 70th anniversary of victory in Stalingrad,¹³⁷ however, the only visiting delegation to Novorossiisk was from the regional capital, Krasnodar. The considerable local and national media hype serves to convince many younger respondents that Beskozyrka is famous worldwide, such that they express naïve surprise that it remains unknown in Western Europe.¹³⁸

For today's ritual, it is the town council which bears the brunt of, and takes the credit for the organization of Beskozyrka. It is in this respect that responsibility for the propagation of memory has changed most significantly, with the original bottom-up transmission of Beskozyrka by the younger generation now centralized and controlled by the local authorities, and the only remaining spark of individuality and spontaneity on the periphery now officially incorporated into the official mainstream narrative at Malaia zemlia.

Young people in Novorossiisk appear today to be less able or willing to use their own initiative in the field of memory than in the Brezhnev era. What started as a rare example of a bottom-up ritual in the Soviet Union, albeit under the not insignificant influence of the Brezhnev era war cult, has become more like the top-down type of invented tradition described by Hobsbawm, with its emphasis on the propagation of social values through collective memory. With Russia going through a second cult of war memory under Putin, the Soviet emphasis on patriotism and moral education of the young are once again in evidence, affording national and local conditions under which this unique remembrance ritual is thriving and where increasing empathy with the landing troops is demonstrated. There may be a growing audience of schoolchildren to ensure its future propagation, but, nonetheless, the tradition would not last unless enjoying popular approval from the public as a whole, with the support

7--1-2011r [accessed 09/02/2011]. This figure was revised upwards to nearer twenty thousand by the local press: Gailesh, "Novorossiisk 'Beskozyrka 2011'."

134. Provisional figure from Deputy Mayor Natal'ia Maiorova.

135. Podyma, "Beskozyrka," 47. Podyma claims that, over the 45 years since its inception, 350,000 people have taken part in the ceremony: Oksana Mashkarova, "Novorossiisk pomnit! [Novorossiisk Remembers!]," *Novorossiiskii rabochii* (05/02/2013), 1.

136. "Novosti [The News]," *Pervyi kanal*, 0900 (4 Feb. 2011), <http://www.1tv.ru/newsvideoarchive/pd=04.02.2011> [accessed 08/07/2012].

137. This took place on 2nd February, while the Beskozyrka ceremony was on 3rd February 2013.

138. See also reference to the alleged fame of the "Shkhuna rovesnikov" in its heyday throughout the Soviet Union: Evgenii Lapin, "'Shkhuna' ne spuskaet parusa [The Schooner is not lowering its sails]," *Novorossiiskii rabochii* (8 Nov. 2010), <http://novorab.ru/ArticleSection/Details/1509/24> [accessed 20/11/2011].

of local and regional authorities. The proactive maintenance of this tradition with its regular re-invention helps to define the identity of the hero-city of Novorossiisk and ensures that the myth of Malaia zemlia remains at the heart of the local community.

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